

Message Text

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21

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01

SAB-01 SAM-01 AID-05 /063 W
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P R 210730Z MAY 75

FM AMEMBASSY SANAA

TO AMEMBASSY JIDDA PRIORITY

SECSTATE WASHDC 5546

INFO USCINCEUR

COMIDEASTFOR

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SANAA 1230

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT

SUBJECT: CURRENT INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS

REF: SANA 1214

BEGIN SUMMARY: DURING MAY 19 CALL CONSULTATIVE ASSEMBLY
PRESIDENT SHAIKH AL-AHMAR TRIED TO DEFEND HIS OPPOSITION
TO HAMDI'S RECENT CHANGES IN YEMENI MILITARY BY FOCUSING
ON NEED FOR CONSULTATIVE ASSEMBLY TO PROTECT "CONSTITUTIONALISM"
IN THE FACE OF THREAT OF POSSIBLE MILITARY TAKEOVER. HE
EXPRESSED HOPE, HOWEVER, THAT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN YEMENI
MILITARY AND CIVILIANS WILL BE RESOLVED PEACEFULLY. I
TRIED TO EMPHASIZE TO AL-AHMAR THE NEED FOR COOPERATION BETWEEN
YEMEN'S MODERATE FORCES IN THE FACE OF THE COMMON
THREAT FROM LEFTIST EXTREMISM. I ALSO STRESSED THAT USG
HAS NO FAVORITES IN YEMEN AND THAT WE WISH TO COOPERATE
WITH ALL THOSE WHO ARE TRULY WORKING FOR THE INTERESTS
OF YEMEN AND THE FREE WORLD. AL-AHMAR THANKED ME FOR MY
ADVICE AND SEVERAL TIMES TOLD ME THAT HE "FULLY UNDERSTOOD"
WHAT I WAS TELLING HIM. I BELIEVE VISIT WAS USEFUL
IF ONLY TO SET RECORD STRAIGHT WITH AL-AHMAR ABOUT RECENT
RUMORS ALLEGING US AND CIA INVOLVEMENT IN YEMEN'S INTERNAL
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AFFAIRS. THROUGHOUT TALK AL-AHMAR APPEARED TO BE ON THE

DEFENSIVE AND NOT A MAN PREPARING TO STAND UP TO AL-HAMD. RECENT REPORTS INDICATE THAT DESPITE HIS SHAIKHLY PARAMOUNTCY, MANY OF HIS OWN FOLLOWERS APPEARANTLY NOW WILLING SUPPORT HIM AGAINST HAMDI. IF SAUDIS DO NOT PROVIDE HIM WITH MATERIAL OR MORAL ENCOURAGEMENT DURING HIS CURRENT VISIT TO RIYADH IT MAY WELL BE THAT AL-AHMAR'S DAYS OF ACTING LIKE YEMEN'S NEW IMAM MAY NOW BE COMING TO A CLOSE. END SUMMARY.

1. ON EVENING MAY 19 I PAID A CALL ON CONSULTATIVE ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT SHAIKH ABDULLAH AL-AHMAR, PARAMOUNT SHAIKH OF THE HASHID CONFEDERATION. THE CALL WAS MADE AT THE REQUEST OF CHIEF OF STAFF OAND DEPUTY COMMANDER IN CHIEF AL-GHASHMI, WHO EARLIER SAME DAY THOUGHT IT WOULD BE A GOOD IDEA FOR ME TO HAVE A "FRIEND-TO-FRIEND" TALK WITH AL-AHMAR IN VIEW OF THE LATTER'S RUMOR-MONGERING TO THE EFFECT THAT THE US AND CIA WERE BEHIND PRESIDENT HAMDI'S RECENT CHANGES IN THE YEMENI MILITARY. (SEE REFTTEL)

2. AFTER USUAL POLITE EXCHANGES, I REMINDED AL-AHMAR ABOUT OUR FIRST MEETING SEVERAL MONTHS AGO IN WHICH AL-AHMAR SAID HE WOULD LIKE TO MAINTAIN CLOSE AND REGULAR CONTACTS WITH ME. I TOLD AL-AHMAR I WAS VISITING HIM THIS PARTICULAR EVENING TO CONTINUE THESE CONTACTS, PARTICULARLY IN VIEW OF RECENT INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS WHOSE SIGNIFICANCE I HOPED SHAIKH AL-AHMAR WOULD ANALYSE FOR ME. AL-AHMAR IMMEDIATELY LAUNCHED INTO A LONG PERORATION DURING WHICH INTER ALIA HE STRESSED THE DEVOTION OF THE YEMENI PEOPLE AND ESPECIALLY OF HIS FAMILY TO "CONSTITUTIONALISM AND DEMOCRACY". AL-AHMAR CONTINUED THAT RECENT EVENTS HAVE CAUSED MUCH CONCERN AMONG THE MEMBERS OF THE CONSULTATIVE ASSEMBLY BECAUSE OF WHAT APPEARS TO BE A STRENGTHENING OF THE MILITARY AT THE EXPENSE OF THE CIVILIAN FORCES OF THE COUNTRY. AL-AHMAR POINTED OUT THAT WHEN MILITARY OFFICERS GET TOO STRONG THEY ARE RELUCTANT TO GIVE UP THEIR POWER. HE CITED PORTUGAL AS AN EXAMPLE OF WHAT THE MILITARY CAN DO IN THE NAME OF STABILITY AND LAW AND ORDER. AL-AHMAR CONTINUED THAT AFTER HAVING SHED SO MUCH BLOOD TO RID THIS COUNTRY

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OF THE IMAM'S DICTATORSHIP, YEMENIS NOW HAVE NO DESIRE TO SEE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A MILITARY DICTATORSHIP AND FOR THIS REASON THE CONSULTATIVE ASSEMBLY MUST ALWAYS BE ON GUARD TO PROTECT THE CONSTITUTION AND TO PREVENT AGGRANDIZEMENT OF POWER BY THE MILITARY. HE ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT WHATEVER DIFFERENCES EXIST BETWEEN THE MILITARY AND THE CIVILIANS IN YEMEN HE WAS HOPEFUL THAT THEY COULD BE RESOLVED PEACEFULLY BECAUSE YEMEN HAS ALREADY

SUFFERED TOO MUCH BLOODSHED IN THE PAST.

3. I RESPONDED BY STATING THAT THE US GOVERNMENT IS PREPARED TO COOPERATE WITH THE PRESENT YEMENI GOVERNMENT IN AN EFFORT TO ESTABLISH STABILITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN YEMEN BECAUSE FIRST OF ALL WE BELIEVE IT IN THE INTERESTS OF THE FREE WORLD THAT YEMEN BE STRONG AND STABLE AND, EQUALLY IMPORTANT, BECAUSE IT IS IN THE INTERESTS OF THE YEMENIS THEMSELVES. I CONTINUED BY SAYING THAT THE USG HAS NO FAVORITES IN YEMEN NOR IS IT SUPPORTING ANY PARTICULAR GROUP, DESPITE RECENT RUMORS THAT THE US AND THE CIA WERE BEHIND THE RECENT ARMY CHANGES. WE WISH TO COOPERATE WITH ALL YEMENIS WHO ARE WORKING FOR THE INTERESTS OF YEMEN AND THE INTERESTS OF THE FREE WORLD. THE ONLY PERSONS WITH WHOM WE CANNOT COOPERATE WOULD BE THE LEFTIST EXTREMISTS, WHO HAVE LONG BEEN WORKING IN YEMEN TO BRING ABOUT A SITUATION IN WHICH THEY WOULD BE ABLE TO COME TO POWER. I POINTED OUT TO AL-AHMAR THAT AS LONG AS THE MODERATES IN YEMEN, REPRESENTED BY THE CONSULTATIVE ASSEMBLY AND BY THE YEMENI ARMY, WORK CLOSELY TOGETHER THE EXTREMISTS WILL NOT SUCCEED. I RECALLED TO HIM HIS CONCERN ABOUT EVENTS IN INDO-CHINA AS EXPRESSED TO ME SEVERAL TIMES IN THE PAST AND I TOLD HIM THAT CERTAINLY ONE OF THE LESSONS OF INDO-CHINA IS THAT COMMUNISTS CAN ONLY BREED AND SUCCEED WHEN THE MODERATE FORCES OF THE COUNTRY ARE WEAK, DIVIDED AND CORRUPT. I TOLD HIM THAT THE USG HAS NO DESIRE TO SEE THE DEVELOPMENTS IN INDO-CHINA REPEATED IN YEMEN BUT THE US CANNOT DO THE JOB ALONE. THE YEMENIS THEMSELVES MUST PUT THEIR HOUSE IN ORDER IF THE AID COMING TO YEMEN FROM THE US AND FROM OTHER FRIENDS CAN REALLY BE EFFECTIVE. I URGED AL-AHMAR TO COOPERATE WITH AL-HAMDI POINTING OUT THAT BOTH MEN REPRESENT SIGNIFICANT FORCES IN THE COUNTRY WHICH IF PROPERLY LEAD WILL RESULT IN A STRONG, MODERATE AND PROGRESSIVE YEMEN. I
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WARNED AL-AHMAR AGAINST LOCAL "OPPORTUNISTS" WHOSE NAMES HE KNEW BETTER THAN I DID AND WHO HAD LONG BEEN UNWITTING TOOLS OF THE LEFTISTS HERE. I ASSURED AL-AHMAR THAT WE TOO WISH TO SEE CONSTITUTIONALISM AND DEMOCRACY PREVAIL IN YEMEN AND RECALLED TO HIM THE PRE-EMINENT ROLE WHICH THE AMERICAN CONSTITUTION PLAYS IN AMERICAN PUBLIC LIFE, A ROLE OF WHICH HE WAS DOUBTLESS AWARE DURING HIS VISIT TO THE US. I TOLD HIM THAT A CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT, HOWEVER, MUST ALSO POSSESS A LOYAL ARMY AND EFFECTIVE CIVIL SERVICE TO SURVIVE AND THAT IN MY OPINION THIS IS WHAT PRESIDENT AL-HAMDI IS TRYING TO ACHIEVE AND THAT THIS IS A GOAL WHICH AL-AHMAR SHOULD ALSO SUPPORT IN HIS CAPACITY AS PRESIDENT OF THE CONSULTATIVE ASSEMBLY. FINALLY, I WARNED HIM THAT SHOULD YEMEN'S FRAGILE INTERNAL STABILITY BE DESTROYED THROUGH INTERNECINE

QUARRELS THEN THE COMMUNISTS WOULD CERTAINLY COME TO POWER
AND THAT HE SHOULD KNOW THAT HIS NAME WOULD BE FIRST OF
THE LIST OF "THE PEOPLE'S ENEMIES".

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01

SAB-01 SAM-01 AID-05 /063 W

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P R 210800Z MAY 75

FM AMEMBASSY SANAA

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 SANAA 1230

4. AL-AHMAR THAKNED ME FOR MY WORDS OF ADVICE AND
SAID THAT HE APPRECIATED MY HAVING TAKEN THE TROUBLE
TO COME TO SEE HIM AND TO SPEAK TO HIM AS A "FRIEND
AND AS A BROTHER". SEVERAL TIMES HE TOLD ME THAT HE
"UNDERSTOOD" WHAT I WAS TELLING HIM AND THAT MY WORDS
OF ADVICE WOULD BE HEEDED. HE ADDED THAT HE TOO HAD
HEARD THE RUMORS OF US AND CIA INVOLVEMENT IN THE
RECENT MILITARY CHANGES BUT THAT HE DID NOT
BELIEVE THEM. HE ALSO STRESSED THAT HE WAS FULLY
AWARE OF THE DANGER TO YEMEN FROM THE COMMUNISTS.
NONETHELESS, HE CAME BACK TO THE THEME THAT PRESIDENT
HAMDI, WHOM HE DESCRIBED SEVERAL TIMES AS A "GOOD AND
SINCERE MAN," HAD TAKEN SOME PRECIPITIOUS STEPS WHICH
WERE CAUSING ANXIETY. HE ASSURED ME, HOWEVER, THAT HE
WAS CERTAIN YEMEN'S INTERNAL PROBLEMS WOULD BE
SETTLED PEACEFULLY AND FRATERNALLY.

5. COMMENT: AL-AHMAR RECEIVED ME IN HIS HUGH HOUSE
ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF SANA WHICH WAS FILLED WITH
SCORES OF FIERCE-LOOKING YEMENI TRIBESMEN WHO, DRESSED AS THEY

WERE IN THEIR DISTINCTIVE NATIVE GARB, WOULD HAVE BEEN
GOOD CASTING MATERIAL FOR A CECIL B. DE MILLE BIBLICAL
SPECTACULAR IF THEY ALL HAD NOT BEEN CARRYING
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KALASHNIKOV'S AS WELL AS OTHER VARIEGATED MUSKETRY.
DURING OUR CONVERSATION WHICH LASTED ABOUT AN HOUR, WE
WERE CONTINUALLY BEING INTERRUPTED BY RETAINERS BEARING
MESSAGES WRITTEN ON CRUMPLED PIECES OF PAPER WHO
WOULD WHISPER SPASMODIC WORDS INTO THE HALF COCKED EAR OF THEIR
MASTER. DESPITE THIS INTRUSIVE ATMOSPHERE, AL-AHMAR SEEMED
GENUINELY APPRECIATIVE OF MY VISIT AND APPEARED FLATTERED
BY MY SOLICITUDE FOR HIS VIEWS. AT SAME TIME, HOWEVER, MY
POINTED ALLUSION TO RUMORS ABOUT US AND CIA INVOLVEMENT IN
YEMEN'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS OBVIOUSLY GOT THROUGH AS SHAIKH
AL-AHMAR WAS QUICK TO AGREE WITH ME THAT THEY WERE NOT
TRUE. IF ONLY FOR THIS REASON I BELIEVE THE VISIT TO
THE "PARAMOUNT SHAIKH OF THE HASHIDS" WAS USEFUL.
THROUGHOUT THE EXCHANGE AL-AHMAR CONVEYED THE IMPRESSION
OF A RATHER BEWILDERED MAN ON THE DEFENSIVE WHO WAS
TRYING HARD TO PROVIDE ME WITH A CONVINCING RATIONALE
FOR HIS OPPOSITION TO AL-HAMD. HIS SUPPORT FOR CONSTITUT-
IONALISM, HOWEVER, SEEMED RATHER HOLLOW FOR A MAN WHO HAS
BEEN NOTORIOUS FOR HIS HIGH-HANDED APPROACH TO GOVERNMENT
IN YEMEN. NO DOUBT, BY CONSTITUTIONALISM AL-AHMAR MEANS
CONTINUATION OF THE SHAIKHLY SYSTEM WITH, OF COURSE, HIM AT
THE HEAD. IN ANY EVENT, AL-AHMAR DID NOT STRIKE ME AS A MAN
PREPARING TO STAND UP TO HIS POLITICAL RIVAL BUT RATHER
AS A SUPPLIANT LOOKING TO THE SAUDIS FOR SUPPORT IN WHAT
APPEARS TO BE A STRUGGLE NOW GOING AGAINST HIM. IN THIS
REGARD THERE ARE REPORTS THAT A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF HIS OWN
FAMILY WERE LOATHE TO FOLLOW HIM. AL-AHMAR IS STILL
A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH IN YEMEN BUT IT MAY WELL
BE THAT, UNLESS THE SAUDIS GIVE HIM ANY MATERIAL OR MORAL
ENCOURAGEMENT DURING HIS CURRENT VISIT TO RIYADH, AL-AHMAR'S
DAYS OF ACTING LIKE YEMEN'S NEW IMAM MAY NOW BE COMING TO
A CLOSE.
SCOTES

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL STABILITY, MILITARY PERSONNEL, CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, POLITICAL LEADERS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 21 MAY 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: woolflhd
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975SANAA01230
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750178-0311
From: SANAA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750531/aaaabbrz.tel
Line Count: 265
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 SANA 1214
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: woolflhd
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 19 AUG 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <19 AUG 2003 by WorrelSW>; APPROVED <23 DEC 2003 by woolflhd>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CURRENT INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS
TAGS: PINT, YE
To: JIDDA STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006